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THE RÔLE OF THE NURSE IN THE PREVENTION OF DISEASE¹

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It is gradually dawning upon civilized nations, that good health lies at the foundation of good morals and national prosperity. National decay and moral degradation follow in the wake of epidemics and widespread disease. Wherever sanitary science has prevailed, civilization has made rapid strides. High ideals, intellectual development and the nobler things of life cannot flourish in unhygienic surroundings; pure air, pure water and pure food are essential to human progress and development. It would seem that it would hardly be necessary to mention things so simple, that even the least intelligent individual would recognize their importance, but highly civilized communities, even in this enlightened age, have failed to grasp the significance of these factors in promoting human happiness and prosperity, and because of disregard of them, thousands of lives are sacrificed annually.

The chief aim of the medical profession until recent years, has been the cure of disease, but its greatest efforts are now directed towards the prevention of disease. In studying the various problems involved in sanitary science and the prevention of disease, it has been discovered that disease is the greatest foe that man has and that ignorance, inefficiency, crime, misery and racial degeneracy are the end results of bad hygienic conditions and poor health. We then, as doctors and nurses, in promoting good health and preventing disease, are helping in a very fundamental way to solve the world's moral problems and to elevate social standards, no less than do the minister or the social service worker. Dr. Victor Vaughn has said: "With ten generations of freedom from disease, inherited and acquired, the world would be regenerated and the super-man born."

In this transformation of medical knowledge into habits of thought and action, the graduate nurse is destined to play an important rôle. If nurses are to ennoble their profession and clothe it with the dignity it deserves, they must catch this vision of social service; it must permeate their being and be the guiding impulse in their daily tasks. It is this spirit of service to humanity that is lifting many of the common, humble tasks of life into the realm of the ideal and the spiritual. It was my

¹ An abridged version of an address delivered to the graduating class of the Los Angeles County Hospital.

privilege to be in contact with Hull House in Chicago twenty years ago, when visiting nursing was in its infancy, and a deep and lasting impression was made upon my mind at that time regarding the possibilities of social betterment through the introduction of skilled nursing in the homes of the poor. As I would follow the nurse day by day in her rounds, I could see the salutary effect of her work upon the domestic life of these people. She could not speak the language of many of the families she visited, yet through the very neatness of her person, the kindness of her manner and the thoroughness of her work, she imparted lessons of cleanliness, economy and human sympathy which transformed whole families in a few weeks. I know of no other agency in modern life that has such possibilities for teaching the gospel of good health, good morals and good economics as the properly qualified nurse, who is inspired with the dignity and importance of her mission. She is the embodiment of the humanitarian idea so dominant in the world today and is the reincarnation of the lowly Nazarene.

The principle involved in the work of the visiting nurse is being applied to almost every phase of modern life and innumerable opportunities are presenting themselves to the ambitious and up to date nurse. Some of these are actuated by humanitarian motives, while others find it pays to conserve the health of the employees and to prevent disease rather than to pay indemnity for avoidable sickness and loss of time, but whatever the motive leading to a system of health inspection and conservation, the opportunity is offered the conscientious nurse to promote the welfare of mankind and to idealize her profession. The problems which will confront the nurse engaged in welfare work are of the most varied and intricate kind and will require wisdom, tact and diplomacy of the highest order. She must often be the mediator between employer and employee and through her patience, good judgment and love of humanity, she may become one of the great agencies for adjusting difficulties existing between capital and labor. She may start out with the idea that her special work is to teach hygienic living, sanitation and prevention of contagious diseases, but if she is to become a really valuable factor in public welfare work, she must broaden her vision and study economic, industrial and social problems. So closely interlocked are these questions with the one of good health, that no enduring help can be given unless the underlying cause is appreciated and removed. Among the causes contributing to disease among the working classes are poor housing, non-employment, insufficient wages, child labor, poorly ventilated and unsanitary factories, long hours of labor, liquor, cigarette smoking, houses of prostitution, loan sharks and quack doctors. This is a formidable array of evils

to be met, but they inevitably confront the doctor or nurse who essays to cure the physical ills of humanity, and their solution depends in great measure upon the prevention of disease.

Viewed, then, from the highest standpoint, the battle which the nursing profession and the medical profession are waging under the banner of scientific medicine, is the age-old battle that the church, the reformer and the idealist have fought against, social evil, greed, dishonesty, unjust oppression and human misery. If we are to succeed in this great uplifting endeavor, we must equip ourselves with every modern facility for our work. This means that we must uphold the highest standards of medicine and of nursing. Efforts are constantly being made to lower the standards of medical schools and schools of nursing, these efforts being dictated by greed and selfish interests, while specious arguments are set forth to deceive the public and influence legislatures. We must educate the public in medical things until it will demand the best that medical science can offer.

A few of the important qualifications for this humanitarian work are; first, a high standard of moral conduct; second, the improvement of nursing education by upholding state registration and opposing all efforts to lower standards of education. Then, one must seek for herself higher education and special training after she has received her diploma. Lastly, she must identify herself with nurses' associations, both local and national, and she should read scientific journals.

KILL FLIES AND SAVE LIVES

Kill at once every fly you can find and burn his body. Observers say that there are many reasons to believe there will be more flies this season than for a number of years. The killing of just one fly *now* means there will be billions and trillions less next summer. Clean up your own premises; see and insist that your neighbors do likewise. Especially clean "out-of-the-way-places," and every nook and cranny. Flies will not go where there is nothing to eat, and their principal diet is too filthy to mention.—*Special Bulletin, The Merchants' Association of New York.*